



la\_cápsula

## ALIMENTO

Opening at la\_cápsula, May 27th, 6pm

Opening at SAE Greenhouse Lab, June 2nd, 6pm

\*the exhibition is divided in the two venues.

ALIMENTO is an exhibition that explores food systems based on reciprocity and circularity with the earth, with other humans and more-than-humans. To do so, it focuses on **anthropophagy** (the act of eating human flesh), both in the biological and the metaphorical sense, with the intention of examining humans' relation to nourishment (*alimento*) and consequently to the earth. As an element, the earth—the soil—is the ultimate source of nourishment for most living beings on this planet. For centuries, however, western thought has regarded the earth as a resource to be “used” by humans, as opposed to an entity with whom reciprocity must be practiced. Intrinsic to this narrative, is the premise of human superiority.

The exhibition invites the spectator to think about anthropophagy from a perspective that challenges the colonial gaze on this practice and allows an understanding of it *within the cosmovision*<sup>1</sup> of the people who used to practice it. Observed from a non-eurocentric point of view, anthropophagy can encourage us to re-think our food systems from a more sustainable perspective. This is not to say that we should start eating each other, but that we try to understand the biological food chain in an alternative way, which is what the artists in the exhibition explore in their artworks.

**Paloma Ayala's** piece for ALIMENTO is inspired by a soup cooked by the ancient Nahuas (Aztec people) and that we know today as Pozole. This soup was prepared with human flesh, which gave Paloma the idea of cooking a soup with mushrooms grown out of human waste, that could be edible. She began tryouts with a mycologist in 2022 during a transdisciplinary project organised by **Arvae**, but has not yet obtained the desired results. Nonetheless, the idea of the mushroom-based Pozole persists, and she will cook it for the Finissage of the exhibition.

Apart from the soup, Paloma's piece includes a brick installation where body parts made out of clay can be found among ingredients for the soup, and which simultaneously functions as a reading corner (this installation is at la\_cápsula). At the SAE Greenhouse Lab, Paloma built an oven out of the same bricks, which she will use for cooking the soup, and in both spaces, her installations include several “readers” with texts about the topics of the exhibition. The reading materials were provided by all the participants of the show and curated by Paloma.

With her work, Paloma reframes history by fictionalising it. She honours her lineage by cooking a recipe that has been prepared in Mexican kitchens for centuries, but plays with a romanticised presentation of indigenous culture, so as to make visible how easily it can become the subject of extractivism. At the same time, her “anthropophagic” soup is an exercise on de-centring anthropocentrism.

In dialogue with Paloma's installation, and also in the middle of the plants at the Greenhouse, a couple of sculptures made of mycelium can be found. They were “initiated” by **Mu**, an artist and mushroom expert, but ultimately they “made themselves” because their shape was determined by how the mycelium decided to grow. They are a reminder that fungi are the great conduit of entanglements in nature, and that their presence in decomposition processes is fundamental to circularity in nature.

Occupying the central space at the Greenhouse, is Livia Melzi's tapestry, which reproduces an engraving by Theodore de Bry, a Belgian engraver famous for his depictions of early European expeditions to America. Among his most well-known work was a series of images recounting Hans Staden's experiences of cannibalism in Brazil. The images shows a group of women and children eating a soup made of a human head and intestines. They are of gruesome and sensationalistic character, and nothing but a demonstration of the colonial gaze on the indigenous peoples, which has been the object of study of many of Livia's works in recent years.

Recent archeological and anthropological studies suggest that in Mexico, anthropophagy belonged to an understanding of the universe based on a “model of consumption” in which not only humans, but gods, spirits and nature itself would consume each other. Among tribes in Brazil, it was practiced for reasons of honor, revenge, cultivation of enmity and also to forge alliances. In the Tupinambá culture, represented in the tapestry, eating an enemy was the opportunity to avenge the death of a member of their own tribe, that had been previously been captured and devoured. “In the cannibalistic act one assimilates the enemy's perspective, dissolving and integrating his difference as if it were food [...] within an economy that establishes symbolic advantages for the victimiser and the prisoner”.

In her video *Plat de Résistance* (at la\_cápsula) **Livia Melzi** shows a majestic reception room of the Brazilian embassy in Paris. In this setting, a maître d'hôtel sets out the table according to the most refined french customs, with silverware, crystalware and fine

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<sup>1</sup> In his book *Cannibal Metaphysics*, Anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro shows that Amazonian and other Amerindian tribes inhabit a radically different conceptual universe than ours—in which nature and culture, human and nonhuman, subject and object are conceived in terms that reverse our own.

Limoges porcelain from the embassy's collection. This display of french *arts de la table* are placed in dialogue with the anthropophagic rituals of the Tupinambá tribes, equally elaborate but today extinct. The plat de résistance of this anthropophagic dinner are the limbs of the president of the Palais de Tokyo. His legs and arms moulded in plaster, becoming a metaphorical offering to satisfy our appetites.

Anthropophagic practices in Brazil, including the famous *Anthropophagic Manifest* written in 1928 by Oswald de Andrade (regarded as the moment when Brazilian modernism started) will be further explored in **Pedro Zylbersztajn's** essay "Eat the word, chew the meaning, prophesy the taste", which he will read during the Finissage of the exhibition, as a preamble or "amuse-bouche" to Paloma's soup. In this text, Pedro delves into historical and contemporary metaphors comparing reading and textual comprehension to eating and digesting.

The works by Kadija de Paula and La Polinizadora for ALIMENTO do not directly address the topic of anthropophagy, but instead offer ideas on how to utilise human fluids or excreta in order to support the food system or to grow food, which can be interpreted as a contemporary way of practicing anthropophagy.

*Milch*, by **Kadija de Paula** is "a proposal of sustainable and solidary food, produced by and for human bodies, to be distributed by an alternative exchange system developed according to the collective decision of lactating bodies of the future, free of exploitation". It is a provocative conceptual exercise to discuss social habits related to protein production and consumption, intrinsic to our cultural and social identities related to gender, sexuality, reproductive rights, labor, colonisation and self-organized networks of care.

The goal of her work is to break taboos by asking questions around lactation, reproduction, exploitation and consumption. *Milch* is also a site specific installation that brings back the history of the old milk bar at Anwandstrasse 9 in Zürich where la\_cápsula is currently located. It is a fictitious invitation (until now) to collect milk by bringing bodies with mammary glands together, to stimulate their nipples physically and or hormonally to induce collective milk production, to test practical and technical aspects of collective lactation by a multiplicity of bodies.

Cacalabaza (or Poopumpkins in English) is the work of **La Polinizadora** for this exhibition. Their proposal is to show that circular models of growing food, in which human waste is used, are not only a possibility, but are within our reach. La Polinizadora is a collective based in Mexico, interested in the culture of "good living", in developing practices for food sovereignty and collective care. For this project, they created posters with the instructions to build dry toilets, which can be used to create compost out of human waste. This compost can be safely used for growing vegetables, as their installation shows. Using the compost of the dry toilets of one of the collective's members, pumpkins were grown in the city of Oaxaca and then distributed to some of the people in their community. Besides sharing the instructions/design to build a dry toilet, La Polinizadora also created a library with material related to the use of human waste for food growth, this library, the "Cacoteca" can be accessed via the QR Code in their posters.

Investigation around these topics has been at the center of the work done by the scientists of the **SAE Greenhouse Lab**, where the second part of the exhibition is located. Besides the practical application of circular practices (such as using human-urine-based fertilisers to grow food at the greenhouse, or the production of biochar), the research done by the SAE Greenhouse Lab emphasises the importance of these practices because of the impact they generate not only at the agro-ecological level, but at the socio-political one.

To further discuss and exchange and expand the conversation around these topics, in collaboration with the **SAE Greenhouse Lab** and **Arvae**, we have organised a Symposium where artists and scientists will participate. The Symposium will take place at the SAE Greenhouse lab on June 13th, with the participation of scientists Dr. Tania Galindo Castañeda, Dr. Sandra Smith Aguilar and Dr. Benjamin Wilde.

Anthropophagy was common among the indigenous peoples of Mexico and Brazil before the territory known as America was colonised by Europe. This practice was used as an excuse for the conquest of this territory, since it allowed the colonisers to categorise the indigenous peoples as barbaric, and to justify their genocide.

With this exhibition we try to reframe this practice in order to challenge extractivist, patriarchal, capitalist and colonial models of understanding nourishment and relating to nature. Real or metaphorical, anthropophagy offers an opportunity to re-evaluate the assumptions of human supremacism and to see ourselves as edible, natural beings that are not on top, but merely a part of the food chain.

ALIMENTO is the first of a series of 3 exhibitions entitled "Earth is the heaviest element" which addresses the need to de-construct and re-construct our relationship to the earth, other humans and more-than-humans. It brings together the knowledge and practices of Latin American and European artists and scientists, in order to suggest alternative ways of co-existing.

Curated by Adriana Domínguez

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